

Washington, DC— Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore) introduced H.R. 5976, the “U.S. Commission on Rebuilding America for the 21st Century Act.” America is facing an infrastructure crisis that cannot be ignored. The levee breaches in New Orleans, bridge collapse in Minneapolis and burst pipes in New York City are only the most visible signs of the nation’s infrastructure failings. The actual dangers, and threats posed by global warming, are much greater. Congressman Blumenauer’s legislation would provide a mechanism for Congress to reach out to the American people and develop a national vision to guide infrastructure investment for the 21st century.

“America faces some of the greatest challenges in history, including a flagging economy and global warming,” said Congressman Blumenauer. “By making the right investments now in our nation’s infrastructure, we can create jobs to stimulate the economy, prepare the nation for global warming -- the greatest challenge of our generation -- and keep America competitive with other nations that are outpacing our investments.

“My commission would help the federal government work with local communities to develop a renewed national focus on infrastructure investment that is essential to our cities, rural communities, economy, and health of our planet. For too long we’ve neglected these needs, and New Orleans and Minneapolis are grave reminders of the high cost of neglect.

“We have met similar challenges in the past, and it is no coincidence that I introduce this bill on the bicentennial and centennial of two great plans that laid the foundation for our country. Today, with new leadership, I am confident we can create a new national vision that will meet the unique challenges of the 21st century.”

H.R.5976 will establish a 17-member commission, appointed by Congress, the Administration, and state and local governments, to guide investment in the nation’s infrastructure.

What the commission would be tasked to do:

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Synthesize existing reports to identify challenges and needs

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Commence a thorough set of public hearings on infrastructure conducted in not fewer than 50 Congressional districts across the United States to ensure geographic and demographic representation

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Articulate a national vision for infrastructure investments.

Those challenges are both myriad and significant. Consider:

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To avoid the worst effects of climate change, we must greatly reduce our carbon emissions. Transportation is the second largest—and fastest growing—source of U.S. CO2 emissions. Personal vehicle use accounts for nearly 60 percent of these emissions.

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The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission recently calculated that maintaining our existing transportation system over the next 50 years will require \$225 billion annually.

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The American Society of Civil Engineers has given our nation's public infrastructure – water, transportation, and other systems – a grade of D-minus, estimating that it will cost \$1.6 trillion over the next five years merely to repair our existing infrastructure.

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More than 72,000 miles of municipal water and sewer pipe are more than 80 years old, threatening the health, environment, and economy of communities large and small. From 1999

to 2009, the Nation's electricity demand rose nearly 20 percent while our transmission capacity grew only 3.5 percent.

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By 2050, we will build 89 million new or replaced homes as well as 190 billion square feet of new offices and other non-residential buildings. Strategic development choices could reduce total transportation-related CO2 emissions by 7 to 10 percent.

This year marks the bicentennial of the Gallatin Plan, crafted by President Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, to develop the infrastructure needed by our new nation. One hundred years later, President Theodore Roosevelt invited every state and territorial governor to join members of his Cabinet and Congress, professional organizations, and government bureaus in a National Conference at the White House to plan for the infrastructure and conservation needs for the 20th century.

Congressman Blumenauer is a recognized leader in Congress and Oregon for his innovative accomplishments in transportation, planning, and the environment. A former member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Congressman Blumenauer is a strong advocate for federal policies that address transportation alternatives, provide housing choices, support sustainable economy, and improve the environment.

Appointed this Congress to the powerful Committee on Ways and Means, the Budget Committee and the Select Committee on Global Warming and Energy Independence, Blumenauer has continued his work on global warming and infrastructure investment.

He has authored and co-sponsored legislation to preserve and protect public lands, reinstate the Superfund tax, shift the nation's energy policy towards renewable energy and energy efficiency, curb global warming, and clean our nation's water bodies.